



# NEWSLETTER

March 2024

## Letter from the Editor

**Hello everyone! Welcome to the March Newsletter.**

This edition features a look at how WEAG began working at Copped Hall by Nick Bateson and Tina Holloway.

We also have part 1 of an article on Essex Islands By Lee Joyce and Claire Hooper and a review of Harvey Sheldon's Presidents lecture.

Peter Lilley, Trisha Moxey, John Sheppard and Lee Joyce, examining a Bronze Age ditch in Wanstead Park 2008.



## What's on locally?

For information on museum and local historical societies visit.

<http://www.weag.org.uk/events/whats-on-locally>

## Recommended Exhibition

**Legion: life in the Roman army.**  
1 Feb 2024 – 23 Jun 2024. £17

The Roman empire spanned more than a million square miles and owed its existence to its



military might. By promising citizenship to those without it, the Roman army – the West's first modern, professional fighting force – also became an engine for creating citizens, offering a better life for soldiers who survived their service.

What did life in the Roman army look like from a soldier's perspective? What did their families make of life in the fort? How did the newly-conquered react? Legion explores life in settled military communities from Scotland to the Red Sea through the people who lived it.

**The British  
Museum**

**There is still time to visit this fantastic exhibition.**

A once in a lifetime opportunity to see some of the greatest wonders of the Roman Army all in one place, including our very own Waltham Abbey iron smith's tools. The only complete Scutum (right) and evidence for crucifixion in Roman Cambridgeshire.



# WEAG CALENDAR OF EVENTS

## Lecture Program

Lectures are accessible via Zoom at 7:15pm

For Lecture Meetings shown as 'Zoom', the Zoom details for that meeting will be circulated to WEAG members a few days before the meeting. Non-members are welcome to join in the Zoom meetings (for a £2 contribution).

Contact [membership@weag.org.uk](mailto:membership@weag.org.uk) for more details.

We plan to run a mixed program of in-person and zoom lectures and where possible hybrid meetings. All meetings are on Monday evenings.

**8th April (zoom)** 7:15pm for 7:30pm start  
The Prittlewell Prince: an Anglo Saxon royal tomb *by Ken Crowe*

**13th May Rudge Lecture (WCHS & Zoom)** 7:15pm for 7:30pm start  
How Sacred Are the Dead? By Professor Ronald Hutton

**10th June (WCHS)** 7:15pm for 7:30pm  
Anatomy of a farming landscape

## How the West Essex Archaeology Group (WEAG) began work at Copped Hall



WEAG members: including Nick, Val and David at Avebury in 2002

Nick (Bateson) first learned of WEAG in the late 1990s, after he had retired and decided to study at the University of London's Birkbeck College. Having joined archaeological digs in south London, Malta, Syon House and elsewhere, he was now looking for a local organisation. Posters advertising WEAG meetings were displayed in the Woodford Green Library where Nick's wife Val worked, so he began to go along.

WEAG had a program of speakers and occasional trips to archaeological sites, but no active program of excavation at that time. That had ceased when

Frank Clarke, who had lead it for many years was no longer

able to do so. Nick along with a number of other members including David Tingey, Chair of the WEAG committee, wanted this work to begin again, and seeing it as the lifeblood of the organisation and an important source of new members. But we needed somewhere to dig.

David and Nick decided to investigate work being undertaken at Waltham Abbey by Peter Huggins and the Waltham Abbey Historical Society (WAHS), and were able to join in the excavation of the "Flash lock" in the river there. We told Peter of WEAG's need for a program of excavation and wondered if we should join his project. Peter did not feel the project offered enough scope for both groups



Peter Leading a tour of Ambury Banks in 2001, for both WAHS & WEAG members. Note Nick, Tina and Tony are all present



so suggested the most useful thing we could do was library research on the Abbey.

However we did not want to only do library research, and luckily Peter knew of a restoration project starting up nearby at Copped Hall. The site had been saved from development and acquired by the nascent Copped Hall Trust: perhaps we might dig there?

We went to a meeting held by the Copped Hall Trust in the ruined mansion, without electricity and dark except for candles at the front of the room, where you could just see Alan Cox, who reported in his long, arduous struggle to save Copped Hall from demolition and development into a hotel and golf course.

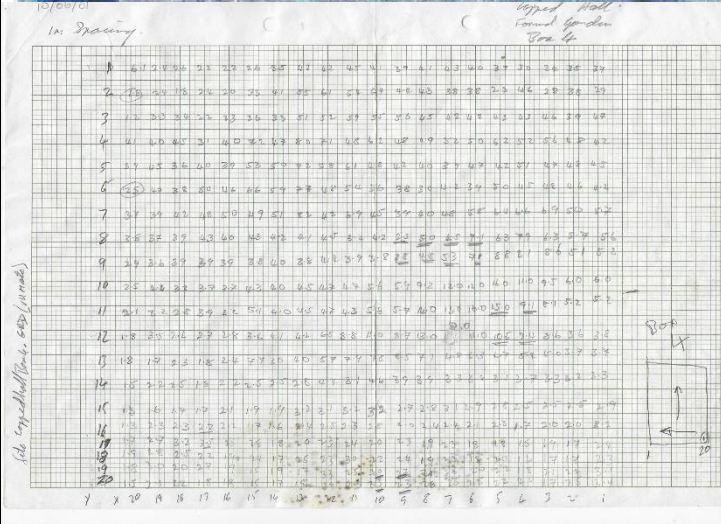
The site had finally been bought and was being secured to prevent further vandalism, theft and collapse of the structures.



Copped Hall in May 2001

After the meeting Nick approached Alan and introduced himself and WEAG, and suggested the possibility of archaeological work at Copped Hall. Alan was interested in this as part of his plan for Copped Hall to become a place for community education, but we knew that to work well at Copped Hall WEAG would have to co-operate well with Alan and the Trust, and prove ourselves.

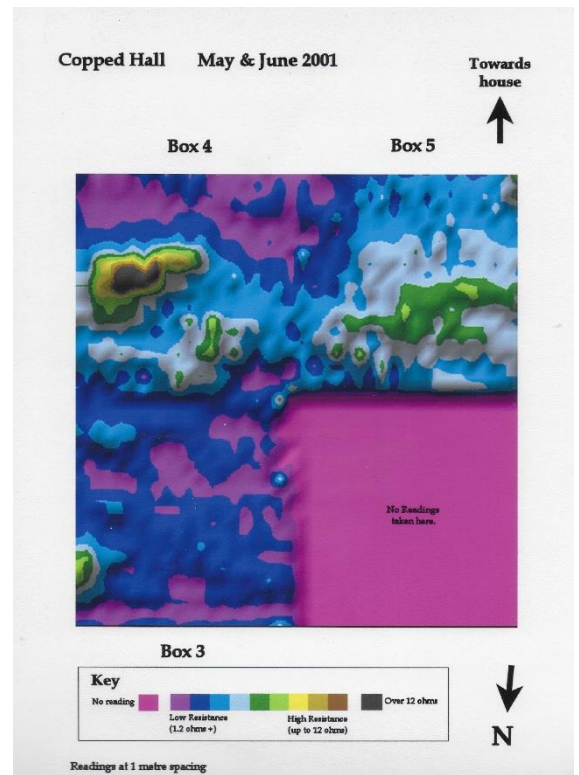
Left: John Avis and Ian Drake carrying out Geophysics (10<sup>th</sup> June 2001). Below John's hand written readings and the plot for Box 4



Essex. No digging would be possible that year, so WEAG with the help of the Hendon and District Archaeological Society (HADAS) instead carried out a Geo-physical survey of parts of the garden.

Our first dig was in 2002: WEAG's Research and Excavation Committee set out a program of work and secured Alan Cox's agreement on how it should be done, and three trenches were dug near the standing loggia pillar at the north of the gardens.

We had hoped to start work in 2001 but foot and mouth disease had been found in







Again we had help from HADAS and the Enfield Archaeological Society. The dig was supervised by another Birkbeck student and professional archaeologist Tina Holloway. WEAG's 2002 excavations followed on from investigations in the 1980s by David Andrews of the Archaeological section of Essex County Council. Vital contributors such as Sara Woollard, Lee Joyce and many others were soon on board, and within a few short years we had demonstrated the significant survival of the remains of "Old" Copped Hall.



David Tingey at O.S benchmark on the stables 20<sup>th</sup> May 2001.

Above: Tina surveying in the first TBM 13<sup>th</sup> May 2001  
 Right: Nick, Pauline Dalton & Roger Gibbons carrying out Resistivity survey in 2003



Left: The first trenches by the standing Loggia pillar. June 2002



The significant surviving remains of "Old" Copped Hall August 2015.

Below Left: MOLA Photogrammetry team working on our 3d model. Below right: the WEAG team cleaning and recording in advance of the MOLA visit



Nick Bateson and Christina Holloway

## Essex Islands Part 1

### Pre-history

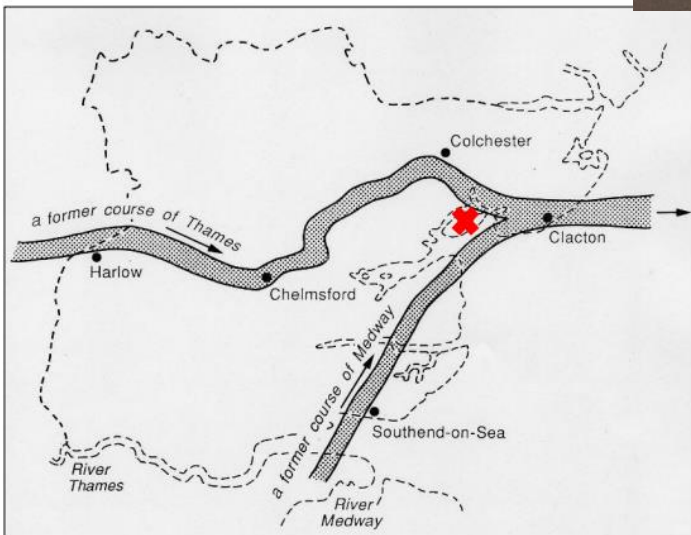
Essex has the longest coastline of any county in the country and is home to more islands than any other county. There are five principal island groups and forty principal islands. Many of you may already know that the Thames once flowed through Harlow, however around 400,000 years ago the Medway also flowed through Essex and the two rivers diverged on



Aerial view of Mersea island showing multi-period archaeology typical of Essex Island

what would later become Mersea Island. Many Essex islands have been occupied since the return of humans to the British isles as the ice sheets began to melt, at the beginning Mesolithic. Many objects have been recovered including a number of very high status polished Axes.

The former courses of the Thames & Medway. Mersea Island marked in red. C400,000 BC (Lucy1999)





## Five principal island groups

1. The Walton Backwaters
2. The Mersea Group
3. The Crouch and Blackwater group
4. Essex Archipelago
5. Canvey Group



One of the most extraordinary prehistoric discoveries from an Essex island is a Bronze Age trackway at East Mersea. Planks were crafted using bronze axes and then the large oak planks laid on brushwood to stop them from sinking into the mud. The trackway was wide enough to drive animals out to the saltings for grazing and for transporting wood



Neolithic axes from Mersea Island.



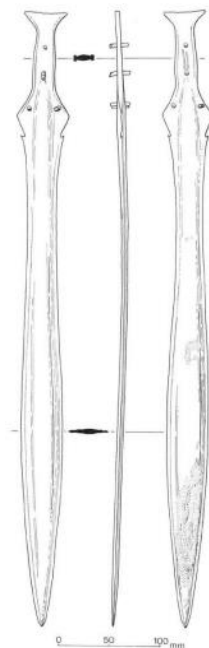
from the forest. It dates from the Late Bronze Age between 952 - 860BC. The trackway's size and scale make it a rare and important find, being the only example of its type known in the Greater Thames estuary.

All this would have needed a large workforce and organisation and the evidence for centralization was already in place when the burial mound of the chieftains were built, two such groups exist on the island and were constructed between 2200 and 1000BC. When one was excavated recently by the CITIZEN project it included a subsidiary burial dated stylistically to 1000BC. Also recovered from the Island was a very high status sword dating 800BC thus the evidence suggests high status occupation on the Island throughout the Bronze Age.

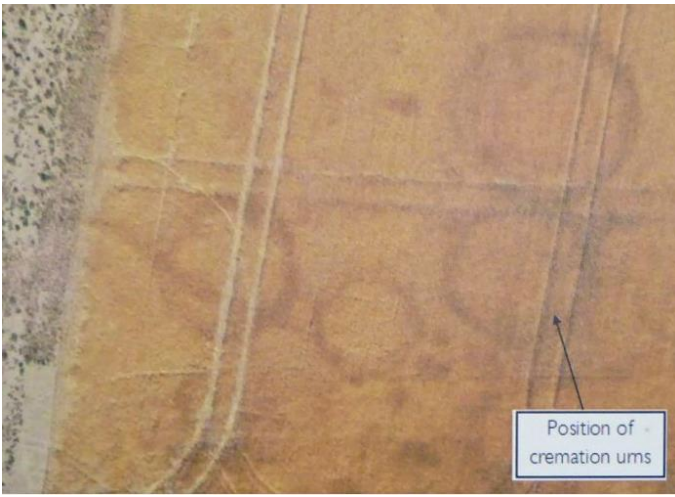
Mersea Island continued to be of importance into the Iron Age. A hoard of four gold stater has been recovered, as well as a further gold stater of the Ambiani tribe (from modern day Picardy) and other stray finds. An impressive burial group was also found. This contained pots with both Gallo Belgic (British) and French characteristics although in a local fabric imitating continental forms. This combination suggests they pre-date the high status burial at Lexdon C 10 BC & can be seen as a legacy of Caesar's invasion rather than anything to do with the later Claudian invasion.

So why were people on the island? One reason is clearly the grazing of livestock but more evident even today is the use of the Island as an area of salt production. Although often thought of as a Roman industry, on a smaller scale salt production is known as far back as the Bronze Age.

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Canvey, is believed to be the island that was chosen as the meeting place for the Cantiaci, Catuvellauni, Trinovanti and Iceni to meet and plan the Boudican revolt. It is also worth noting that Canvey (Counos) is the only one of our islands mentioned by Ptolemy). Then as now



Canvey was in an important strategic position, where ships could be unloaded and goods sent into Essex, before the ships continued along the Thames into London.

**Lee Joyce and Claire Hooper**

## Highgate Roman Kiln Project

In March Hervey Sheldon gave his presidents lecture on the Highgate Roman Kiln Project. First he gave us a history of the Highgate pottery industry and its excavations explaining that the site sits on a high point at the northern end of Highgate wood, an ancient wood and public park owned by the Corporation of the City of London. During the Medieval period, the wood formed part of the Bishop of London's hunting estate.



Tony Brown (archaeologist) drawing the layers of Kiln 2. (Image: H.Sheldon)



Jude Plouviez excavating part of the 'southern dump', where much rejected pottery as well as kiln debris was deposited. (Image: H.Sheldon)

In 1962 and 1963, field surveys initially looking at prehistoric flint distribution, found a scatter of Roman pottery fragments.

In summer 1966 Tony Brown and Harvey Sheldon cut a trial trench which contained Roman pottery including wasters and kiln furniture indicative of pottery production, excavations continued every summer until 1974, eventually ten pottery kilns were discovered with pottery dating to between AD50 and AD160. Adult education students often provided much of the workforce both on site and in the post excavation process.

The pottery is primarily divided into three fabrics dependent on tempering fabric (HWA), with grass or straw inclusions, giving a very open vesicular appearance typically a dark grey-brown. All vessels in this ware seem to be hand-formed dating to the late Iron Age/early Roman, and with a relatively small scale local distribution. Fabric \*(HWA) grog, a reduced, grog-tempered fabric, also containing moderate quantities of organic inclusions. The early HWA products are substantially handmade, many vessels are burnished, smoothed or trimmed near the rim and jars are also finished near the base, but vessels are otherwise unfinished. Later products, particularly the bowls, appear to be either entirely made or finished on a slow wheel. HWA, predominantly 1st century, is the most abundant coarseware in (London's) pre-Boudican contexts, declining rapidly in importance after c 100, this coincides with the rise of (HWC).



A complete poppyhead beaker, Highgate Wood 'C' ware

\* (HWC).sand. Highgate Wood C ware. A very fine textured grey ware,



with abundant, well sorted quartz. Vessels

in HWC are entirely wheel made and a white or light grey, iron-free slip is commonly applied to the upper parts of certain jars and beakers. This slip is then burnished, in most cases before firing. Evidence from the kiln site suggests that the main production of HWC was between 100 and 140, with some probably continuing to 160. The Highgate industry was a significant supplier to London from the mid-first through to the mid-second century AD, responsible for between 30% and 50% of the coarse reduced ware assemblages.

Harvey also spoke about the experimental pottery making and firing that had taken place over the years and of their mixed results. In the summer of

George Demetriou, a participant in the Horniman Museum kiln experiment in 1971(Image: Bernard Brandham).

1971 fifteen teachers from the Inner London Education Authority spent their holiday building three replica Roman kilns in Highgate Wood, the kilns all based on the sites kiln 2. They also made replica Roman pottery from the local clay and carried out experimental firings in the kilns. This was an attempt to understand more about how the pottery was made and fired on site. Further experiments were carried out in 1972&73 and 2010, with plans to continue this work in the future.

"The 1971 firings generally went well. The potters potted successfully, the kilns reached temperatures comparable to those achieved by the Romano-British potters and the pots that emerged were in many ways good examples of the kind of pottery produced in the second century AD in Highgate Wood."

**Nick Peacey, who took part in the experiments.**



Putting the kiln back together for display at Bruce Castle Museum (Image: Bruce Castle Museum 1980's).



Harvey went on to tell us about ongoing plans to return the one of the kilns '2' (the most complete Roman pottery kiln found in Greater London) to the site where it will be put on display, having been in pieces in storage at Tottenham's Bruce Castle Museum. It will now be the centrepiece of a visitors' centre and community learning programme. The project has been awarded a £243,000 National Lottery Heritage Grant the Lottery grant will allow, a joint project between Friends of Highgate Kiln, the City Corporation and Bruce Castle Museum to return the kiln to Highgate Wood to be displayed in a visitor centre from September 2024. The project is called Firing London's Imagination: An Inclusive Approach to Highgate's Roman Pottery Heritage.



### Report by Lee Joyce

\* Fabric Descriptions, form & distribution from (Davies et al 1994)

### Websites

#### THE HIGHGATE ROMAN KILN PROJECT

<https://www.highgateromankiln.org.uk/?fbclid=IwAR3RineYLB61mGGz OrT17TMDj CxdkXX1rphzwR66q4BETpSMek7-JppWk>

#### Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/highgateromankiln>

#### Free download of the book

<https://www.archaeopress.com/Archaeopress/Products/9781784919788>

### References

The Roman Pottery Manufacturing Site in Highgate Wood: Excavations 1966-78 Archaeopress Roman Archaeology 43 A E Brown and H L Sheldon 2018

Hugh Dennis welcomes £243k award for Highgate Roman kiln scheme Bridget Galton. Han & High 24th February 2023

<https://www.hamhigh.co.uk/lifestyle/23345688.hugh-dennis-welcomes-243k-award-highgate-roman-kiln-scheme/>

Davies, B J, Richardson, B & Tomber, R S 1994 A Dated Corpus of Early Roman Pottery from the City of London Council for British Archaeology Research Report No.98 & The Archaeology of Roman London Vol.5, London

<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/browse/issue.xhtml?recordId=1075329>

#### Earlier Publications

Brown, A E 1962 Note in Newsletter, Thames Basin Archaeological Observers' Group NS 9, 10

Brown, A E 1963 Note in Newsletter, Thames Basin Archaeological Observers' Group NS15, 8

Brown, A E, & Sheldon, H L 1968a 'Practical archaeology' Teaching Adults 3(2), 3-4

Brown, A E & Sheldon, H L 1968b 'A Roman kiln site in Highgate Wood' Camden Journal 3(5), 100-1

Brown, A E, & Sheldon, H L 1969a 'An early Roman pottery factory in North London' London Archaeol 1(2), 38-44\*\*

Brown, A E, & Sheldon, H L 1969b 'Post excavation work on the pottery from Highgate' London Archaeol 1(3), 60-5\*\*

Brown, A E, & Sheldon, H L 1969c 'Practical archaeology: a beginners' course in Highgate Wood' Adult Education 41(5), 314

Brown, A E, & Sheldon, H L 1970 'Highgate 1969' London Archaeol 1 (7), 150-4\*\*

Brown, A E, & Sheldon, H L 1971 'Highgate Wood 1970-1971', 300-3\*\*

Brown, A E, & Sheldon, H L 1974 'Highgate Wood: the pottery and its production' London Archaeol 2(9), 222-31\*\*

Unknown. London Archaeol, 1(1), 15\*\*

\*\*All downloadable at

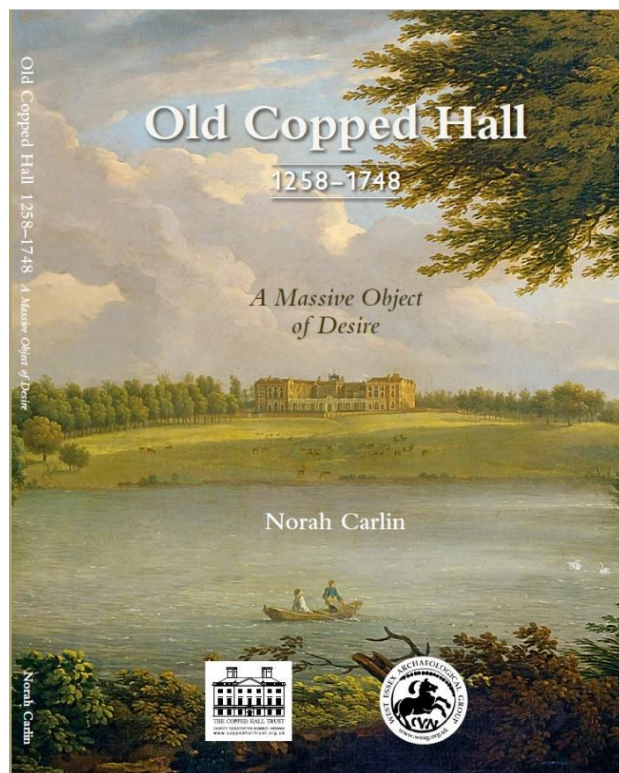
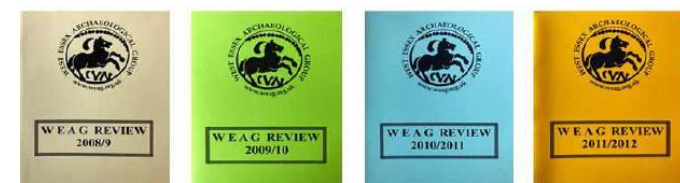
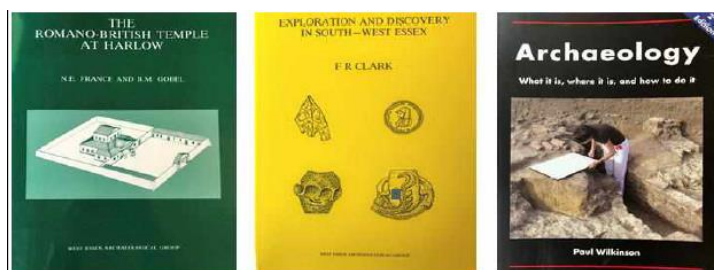
<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/browse/series.xhtml?recordId=1000237>

Friends of Highgate Roman Kiln including Catherine West MP, Harvey Sheldon, and patrons Hugh Dennis and Claire Skinner are celebrating a lottery heritage grant to display the ancient artefact (Image: Friends of Highgate Roman Kiln)



## BOOK SALE

	RRP	Special Offer Price
Old Copped Hall from 1258 to 1748	£25.00	£20.00
The Romano-British Temple at Harlow	£ 7.00	£ 3.50
Exploration and Discovery in South West Essex	£ 7.00	£ 3.50
Archaeology – what it is and how to do it	£ 9.50	£ 8.50
Copped Hall Report 2003	£ 4.00	£ 2.50
Copped Hall Report 2004 / 5	£ 7.00	£ 2.50
Copped Hall – A Short History (Cassidy)	£ 2.50	£ 2.50
Annual Review 2008/2009	£ 0.50	£ 0.50
Annual Review 2009/2010	£ 0.50	£ 0.50
Annual Review 2010/2011	£ 0.50	£ 0.50
Annual Review 2011/2012	£ 0.50	£ 0.50
Wanstead Park – Revealed (DVD)	£ 3.00	£ 1.50
Wanstead Park – Living Park (DVD)	£ 3.00	£ 1.50
The Wanstead Archive (DVD)	£ 3.00	£ 1.50



## Contacts

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